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NIELS EBBESEN
AND
GERMAND GLADENSWAYNE

TWO BALLADS

BY
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :
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NIELS EBBESEN.

All his men the Count collects,
And from Slesvig marched away ;
Never such as host was seen
Or before or since that day.

Into Denmark marched the Count,
Followed by so fair a band ;
Banners twenty-four they bore,
Power like theirs might none withstand.

Gert the Count to Randers rode,
To bad counsel lending ear ;
For from old it stood foretold,
He should end there his career.

He would not the place avoid,
But seemed bent to tempt his fate ;
Of the rural lords and thanes
He the quarters up will beat.

Knights and freeborn men apart,
There trooped eighteen thousand bows ;
Forty thousand made they all,
Who could such a host oppose ?

To Niels Ebbesen the Count
Word to appear before him sent ;
And safe convoy him he gave,
Which should doubt and fear prevent.

Gert the Count met Ebbesen
North of Randers by the sea :
“ Welcome be, Niels Ebbesen !
Say how matters stand with thee.”

To Niels stretched the Count his hand,
And to parleying straight they go ;
There was little then of jest,
And of dallying less, I trow.

“ Sir Niels Ebbesen, thou art
 Welcome as the flowers in spring ;
 How stand minds in North Jutland,
 Thence what tidings dost thou bring ?

“ Say how all thy wealthy friends
 And thy heart’s loved lady are ;
 Which dost wish for at my hands,
 Smiling peace, or bloody war ? ”

“ Well stand minds in North Jutland,
 Each man’s courage there’s erect ;
 Say, dost come as friend or foe ?
 What from thee may we expect ?

“ I have kindred in the North,
 Men of wealth and noble race ;
 Shouldst thou it require of them
 They’ll be ready for thy Grace.”

“ Wise art thou, Niels Ebbesen,
 And thy prudence none can doubt ;
 When thou canst not straightway hit
 Widely then thou ridst about.

“Hear thou, Sir Niels Ebbesen,
Thou must on mine errand ride ;
Say, how many men thou hast
Brought, on whom thou mayst confide ?”

“Kindred, Sir, I have, and friends,
’Mongst the hardy Jutlanders ;
Willingly they follow me
To the stormy strife of spears.

“I have brought, such as they are,
With me thirty mounted men ;
Be they fewer, or be they more,
Dear are they to Ebbesen.”

“Hast thou with thee thirty lads ?
That seems but a scanty force ;
Yester e’en at Sir Bugge’s Gate
Stood’st thou with a hundred horse.”

Backward Ebbesen recoiled,
And with high flushed cheek replied :
“He nor knight nor gentleman
Is, who me hath thus belied.

“Be it man or woman who
 To my face dares that to say,
 Till I’ve answered suitably,
 Ne’er from him I’ll flinch away.”

“Hear thou, dear Niels Ebbesen,
 We thereof will talk no more ;
 To thy friend Sir Bugge ride,
 Him to serve me true win o’er.”

“If your errand I shall do,
 And to Bugge bold repair,
 From thy part what I’m to say
 First to me thou must declare.”

“Bugge bold has me defied,
 Young Poul Glob has done the same ;
 Anders Frost makes one of them,
 Him your Chief ’tis said ye name.

“And e’en thou, Niels Ebbesen,
 Certain courtiers hast with thee,
 Who have eaten of my bread,
 And have basely quitted me.

“ First there is young Eske Frost,
And his stalwart brothers two ;
Without leave of mine obtained,
From my service they withdrew.

“ More there are whom I’ve obliged,
And who pay me now no heed ;
If to Bugge’s rede you list
Soon ye’ll see how you will speed.”

“ Nought of Bugge’s rede I know,
What he’ll do or leave undone ;
Eske thy true servant was,
Cast no blame that knight upon.

“ Eske Frost’s a gallant man,
Guards his honour like his eye ;
Sought he his discharge to gain,
Why to him didst it deny ?

“ Custom ’tis in Danish land,
And has been from days of eld,
That the man who will not serve
Shall not be to serve compell’d.

“No two things, save Monk and cowl,
Are for aye together tied ;
As they loathe or like their place
Courtmen ride away or bide.”

It was Count Sir Gert, could not
Such like reasoning understand :
“No one ought to quit his lord
Whilst that lord would him command.

“And, Sir Niels, too long thou hast
Here stood idly chattering ;
Either thou shalt Denmark quit,
Or thou shalt on gallows swing.

“’Neath safe convoy since thou’rt come
Thou shalt go withouten hurt ;
To thy cost else thou should’st learn
What it is to anger Gert.”

“I thy princely passport hold,
Whether it avail or not ;
If thou do me aught of harm,
Infamy thy name will blot.

“ Thieves mayst thou on gallows hang,
To be torn by carn and crow ;
For thy threat from native land,
Wife, and child, I will not go.

“ But if me from native land
And my wife and babes you chase,
Thou shalt soon, for certainty,
Rue thou e'er hast seen my face ! ”

“ Ride away, Sir Ebbesen,
Quickly hence thyself betake,
Or I will, as well I can,
On thy skull the helmet break.”

“ None e'er saw me so adread
But that I could tremble still,*
Hear, Count Gert ! look to thyself,
Guard thee from approaching ill.”

“ Ebbesen, thou tirest me,
Suffering thus thy tongue to run ;
Till to-morrow thou art safe,
Even till the set of sun.

* A common Danish expression denoting contempt for a threat.

“ This, and the next day till eve,
 Thou for me shalt be at rest ;
 But no belted knight am I
 If I be not soon thy guest.”

Swift away rode Ebbesen,
 Shook his iron-gloved fist in air :
 “ That I soon shall come again,
 Good Sir Count, in memory bear.”

Forward rode Niels Ebbesen,
 Spurred his steed till blood outflow ;
 With his men the Count remained,
 No one dared the knight pursue.

Till he reached his Castellaye,
 Still he rode withouten rest ;
 To his dear Dame he complained,
 Begged of her her counsel best.

“ Here thou sitt'st, dear Housewife mine,
 What advice canst thou bestow ?
 Gert will drive me from the land,
 Hath declared himself my foe.

“To my choice three things he put,
Least of all I liked the third ;
I should join him, or the land
Quit, or hang, such was his word.”

“Ah ! what counsel can I give
From my simple woman’s mind ?
The most desperate counsel’s best,
Can we but that counsel find.

“The most desperate counsel’s best,
If we can but it discover ;
Either slay the tyrant, or
Burn the house the tyrant over.

“To the smithy lead your steeds,
Let them all be shod anew ;
Turn ye all the heels afore,
Thus your trace will cheat the view.

“Turn ye all the heels afore,
Track ye thus, I ween, can no man ;
Never tell to mortal wight,
Thou hast learnt this from a woman.”

“ Here my gallant swains ye sit,
 Merry-making o’er your drink ;
 Every lad who loves his lord
 From his lord now must not shrink.”

Up then rose the Courtmen bold,
 To take on anew agreed ;
 Save Sir Niels’ sister’s son,
 From his uncle would recede.

Swore the knights a solemn oath
 That for him their lives they’d stake,
 And with him would dauntless ride
 Wheresoe’er a fray he’d make.

So they rode to Fruerlund,
 From their steeds they there dismount ;
 Into Randers then they walked,
 To beat up the hairless Count.

It was Sir Niels Ebbesen,
 To the bridge of Randers came :
 “ He who’s loath to follow me
 Straightway his discharge may claim.”

Forward stepped the tiny Frost,
Thought the truest of the true :
“ Give me my dismissal, Sir,
Give me horse and saddle too.”

So he sought and got discharge,
Saddle got and steed withall ;
But he served his master best
That same day ere evening fall.

To the Count's door rode Sir Niels,
Ne'er from that withdrew his look ;
Thrice thereon with iron lance
Heavily the hero strook.

“ Rise up from thy sleep, my lord !
Let me in right speedily ;
Thy dear brother, Henrik Count,
Has dispatched me unto thee.”

“ By my brother if thou'rt sent,
Rest thee from thy journey long ;
Me to-morrow in the Kirk
Meet 'twixt mass and matin song.”

“ Let your page but at the door
 Take from me the entrusted scroll ;
 Ribe hard invested is,
 Colding town is burnt to coal.

“ Ribe hard invested is,
 Colding’s burnt, and Vedel’s flung
 Open to our troops its gate,
 And Niels Ebbesen is hung.”

“ If what thou hast told be truth,
 News it is to make one gay ;
 Thou shalt in respect be held
 Herald till thy dying day.

“ Page ! no more keep fast the door,
 Let me on the herald gaze ;
 For that we the land have won
 Is the sum of what he says.”

To the window went the Count,
 Thence his eye the lances caught :
 “ Ha ! Niels Ebbesen’s at hand,
 Curse the hour I Denmark sought.”

Fierce with shields the doors they banged,

Burst the locks with frequent blow :

“ Hairless Count ! art thou within ?

Hairless Count, we pledge thee now ! ”

“ Set thee down, Niels Ebbesen,

We shall things accommodate ;

Let us send to Henrik Count,

And Claus Krummedige straight.”

“ Not so yesterday didst thou

Speak, Sir Count, by Randers strand ;

Then thou saidst that I should hang,

Or should quit my native land.”

Up and spoke the Count’s footpage,

Kinsman he to Ebbesen :

“ By his words if ye be fooled

Lost art thou and all thy men.”

Up and spoke the black young page,

Black because he was not white :

“ Straight desist from useless talk,

Let, I rede, your faulchions bite.”

“ I’ve no castles, Sir, which can
 Such a prisoner long contain ;
 Now, ye men, spare not your swords !
 Hew at him with might and main ! ”

So the tyrant Count they took,
 Made him kneel upon the floor ;
 And his bald head off they hewed,
 Hewed it off the bedstead o’er.

Soon as they the Count had slain,
 Loud the drums the alarum beat ;
 It was Sir Niels Ebbesen
 From the town would fain retreat.

From the town he hasted then,
 Dared no longer there to stay ;
 Soon met him Sir Ove Hals,
 And essaycd to bar his way.

“ Do thou hear, Sir Ove Hals !
 Do to me no injury !
 Thou my faithful cousin art,
 Prythee, Ove, let me flee.”

“Our affinity I know

Well I know its near degree ;
But my Lord you’ve foully slain,
Niels ! I will not let thee flee.”

Bleat the sheep, the ganders hiss,
Crows the cock upon the wall ;
Ove Hals was sore beset,
Must to the Holsteiners call.

’Gainst the Danes he could not stand,
Must to the Holsteiners call ;
“Murdered is your liege the Count
Up, and on his butchers fall !”

Fight Sir Ove and Sir Niels,
Ebbesen he would not fly,
He Sir Ove’s head smote off,
Left the corse in blood to lie.

Ebbesen to Randers bridge
Came, there grew the combat hot,
There he found the tiny Frost
Who had late dismissal got.

Niels sped over Randers bridge,
 Holstein's men came thronging after ;
 What did then the tiny Frost
 But the bridge drop in the water.

Thanks to Niels's sister's son,
 Well he served his uncle then ;
 In the firth the planks he cast,
 No bridge found the Holstein men.

Niels a widow visited, .
 She'd but barley bannocks two,
 One she gave to Niels, because
 He the hairless tyrant slew.

Ebbesen ! God sain thy soul,
 Never was a braver Dane ;
 Thou didst free thy fatherland
 From a foreign tyrant's chain.

Christ bless every gallant man,
 Who shall both with mouth and hand,
 In the time of its distress,
 Seek to serve his fatherland !

GERMAND GLADENSWAYNE

Our King and Queen sat o'er the board
In high festivity ;
Between them there was much discourse
About the briny sea.

Our gallant King and youthful Queen
They sailed across the foam ;
Much better had it been for both
That they had stayed at home.

But barely they a mile had gone
When still the vessel stood,
There came a raven wild, who strove,
To sink them in the flood.

“If any thing the ship doth hold
Concealed beneath the main,
I'll give thee, bird, a lump of gold
To set it free again.

“O do not sink us in the sea,
Swart bird,” exclaimed the Queen,
“And I'll give thee a lump of gold
Weighs Bismar pounds fifteen.”

“Gold and silver I heed them not,
I crave another fee,
The treasure neath thy girdle fair
Thou now must promise me.

“Plenty of gold I have myself,
From gold no help you'll find,
On what beneath your girdle's hid
I've firmly set my mind.”

“I give what neath my girdle's hid,
My bunch of keys—what more?
I'll speedily have others forged
If I but win to shore.”

Then straight she took the little keys
And cast them overboard ;
Away then flew the Raven, glad
He had obtained her word.

The Queen walks on the yellow sand,
Then o'er her came a gloom,
She felt that Germand Gladenswayne
Was quick within her womb.

And from that day when five short months
Her head had flitted o'er,
The Queen she went to the chamber high,
And a lovely son she bore.

Born was he in the evening hour,
They christened him at night ;
They called him Germand Gladenswayne,
Concealed him whilst they might.

They fostered him a winter's space,
They fostered him for nine ;
The fairest youth he grew on whom
The sun did ever shine.

So well he throve, so well he grew,
His horse he well could ride,
Whene'er his mother on him gazed
So woefully she sigh'd.

‘ Now list to me, my mother dear,
One thing I fain would know ;
Why dost thou sigh so piteously
Whene'er I past thee go ? ”

“ Now hear thou, Germand Gladenswayne,
I've cause to be forlorn ;
Beguiled I gave thee to a fiend
Before thou yet wast born.”

“ And do thou hear, my mother dear,
All sorrow cast aside :
Whatever be the will of God
By that I must abide.”

It chanced upon a harvest morn
The breezes scarcely stirr'd,
That as the chamber door stood ope
So wild a yell was heard.

In came the laidly bird of prey,
And stood the Queen before :
“ Dost thou remember, gracious Queen,
Thy gift to me of yore ? ”

She swore by God, and by the saints,
By all that's good she swore,
That son nor daughter in the world
She never, never bore.

Then flew away the bird of prey,
With an eldritch shriek he's flown :
“ Whene'er I meet Germand Gladenswayne
I'll remember he's my own.”

When Germand fifteen years had reached
He'd fain a damsel wed ;
He loved the daughter of England's king,
The angel-lovely maid.

His longing to be with his plighted maid
He might no more withstand :
“ O how shall I come across the foam
To the flood-encircled land ? ”

It was Germand Gladenswayne,
He donned his best array ;
And he has ta'en to his mother dear
To the lofty hall his way.

In came Germand Gladenswayne,
In scarlet clad was he :
“ O mother lend me thy feather robe
To fly across the sea.”

“ My feather robe hangs upon the crook,
The feathers droop so low,
If thou dost fly to the foreign land
I shall see thee never moe.

“ The pinions are so broad that they
Grow heavy in the air,
I'll have another made for me
If I live another year.”

He set himself in the feather robe,
Flew o'er the ocean straight ;
And there met him the raven wild,
Beneath a rock did wait.

He flew up, and he flew down,
He flew in fearless guise ;
And when he reached the midst of the sea
He heard a frightful voice.

“ Ha, well met, Germand Gladenswayne,
O'er long hast thou delay'd ;
Thou wast but little when to me
A present thou wast made ! ”

“ O let me fare, O let me fly,
To speak my maiden dear ;
Be sure that I, when her I've seen,
Again will meet thee here.”

Then I will let thee fly, but still
My mark on thee will set,
Lest thou midst knights and beauteous dames
Thy raven lord forget.

Then out the boy's right eye he tore,
And drank up half his blood ;
But still he reached the bower of his bride,
His heart was yet so good.

He set himself by the Damsels' bower,
All bloody and distrest ;
All the dames within that were
Forgot to smile and jest.

All the damsels grew so still,
With horror sat they fast ;
Except proud Damsel Adelude,
Aside her work she cast.

All the maids within forsook
Both jest and merry note ;
'Twas the proud Damsel Adelude
Her hands together smote.

" Now welcome, Germand Gladenswayne,
Where hast thou been to play ?
Say, why bebloodied are thy clothes,
And pale thy cheeks as clay ? "

" Farewell, dear Damsel Adelude,
I soon from thee must fly ;
For he must have my youthful life
Who tore from me my eye."

Her silver handled comb she took,
And strove to comb his head ;
For every hair that she did comb
A briny tear she shed.

For every lock the maiden combed
A stream of tears did run ;
How often she the mother cursed
Who had betrayed her son.

It was Damsel Adelude,
She took him in her arm :
“ Accursed be the wicked Dame
Who caused us all this harm.”

“ Hear thou, sweet Damsel Adelude,
Curse not my mother so,
She had no power in this affair,
We all to fate must bow.”

He set him in his feather robe,
And mounted on the wind ;
She set her in another robe,
And followed fast behind.

“ O turn thee, Damsel Adelude,
Turn my beloved one,
Thy bower door doth open stand,
Thy keys lie on the stone.”

“ Though my bower door doth open stand,
And my keys lie on the stone,
Yet I will follow thee to the place
Where harm to thee was done.”

All the birds she cut so small
She met with there on high,
Except the laidly Raven wild,
And him she could not spy.

’Twas the proud Damsel Adelude
Flew down towards the strand ;
Nought found she of the Gladenswayne
Except the good right hand.

She flew so wroth the clouds below
The laidly bird to find ;
She flew East, and she flew West,
To slay him she designed.

She hacked the birds into pieces three,
Before her knife that came ;
But when she met the Raven wild
Into ten she hacked his frame.

And still till she of sorrow died
She flew across the heath ;
It was for Germand Gladenswayne
She suffered grief and death.

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